



quilting

THE QUILT

BY Dawn Cavanaugh.

Pantograph or Custom— Which Should I Choose?

Fans of Fons & Porter have heard them say more than once, “Done is Good!” When it comes to choosing a quilting method, we occasionally lose sight of the power of those three little words as we agonize over how to quilt a particular project.

Our walls are plastered with cute little plaques that proclaim things like “So many quilts, so little time!” or “She who dies with the most fabric wins!” These not-so-subtle sayings strike a chord with most quilters. We have more quilts we want to make than we can ever accomplish during one lifetime. Yet, we choke when the time comes to actually finish a project by quilting it. We pull out the top and admire our handiwork now and then, but put it back undone, hoping that some day a whoosh of inspiration or divine intervention will tell us what to do.



Quilters have many tools available to help speed up the quilting process, including marking chalk that stays put until you iron it, tear-away quilting design sheets, and pantograph patterns that make complex overall quilting designs possible simply by following a line with a laser on a longarm quilting machine.

As much as we'd like to think each quilt we make is a masterpiece destined for greatness, sometimes we must let go of our delusions of grandeur and move on. Some quilts clearly shout, "PLEASE custom quilt me!!," and some yell, "No way! Overall design, please!" However, many of the quilts we make would look good in either style. The trick is deciding which way to go.

When debating between custom and overall quilting for your quilt, you'll save yourself lots of time and stress if you answer these questions to help you decide:

• Who is the quilt for?

Is it for your parents' 25th anniversary? It deserves custom work.

Is it for your six-year-old niece? She'll jump on the bed with it—overall.

Is it for your son, the college freshman? Definitely overall—he'll never wash it!

Is it for your best friend who's recovering from breast cancer? Could go either way.

• How will the quilt be used?

Let's go back to your best friend recovering from breast cancer. If you want her to snuggle under the quilt during chemotherapy treatments to remind her she's wrapped in love and support, overall quilting would be appropriate. If you want her to hang it on her wall as a symbol of conquering the disease, custom quilting would give it more power.

• How will the quilt be cared for?

If this is a baby quilt and it's destined for a weekly spin through the washing machine, overall quilting is perfect. Use polyester thread so it will hold up to all of that stretching and agitation. Maybe you made it for Uncle Bob the outdoorsman, who will toss it in his truck without EVER washing it. Again, overall quilting is a safe bet.

• Does this quilt have special meaning to me?

It might be important to you because you made it from your daddy's shirts or mamma's skirts, maybe it showcases a new skill you mastered, or perhaps it shows off your collection of batik fabric from your trip to Bali. If you can't attach a lot of personal significance to the quilt, quilt it with an overall design or very simple custom stitching and move on to the next project.

• Will this quilt be entered in a show?

Whether it's a county fair or a national competition, when your quilt is entered in a show, your quilting selection takes on more significance as it relates to overall design. Before you commit to a particular design or style, put yourself in the judge's shoes. The judge will study the quilting to see if the design you chose was appropriate to the quilt's style, and whether it "enhanced" the quilt or did nothing for it.

• Are there areas on my quilt I want to highlight or downplay?

Sometimes a quilt will look better with an overall design that pulls all the pieces together or camouflages things. An overall design can behave like a diffuser. It's like looking through a window screen that softens the view just a little bit—our eyes focus on the screen itself for a brief moment before we realize we can actually see through the screen to the garden behind it. When you want your patchwork to be the star of the show, choose custom quilting to highlight its fine points.

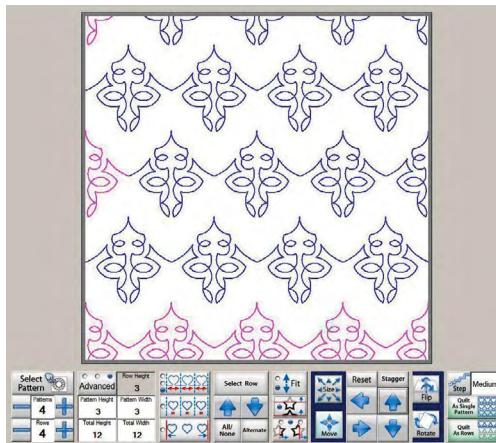


Quilters aren't shy about using technology to help them finish their quilts in record time. Computer systems now available for quilting machines make overall and custom quilting a breeze!

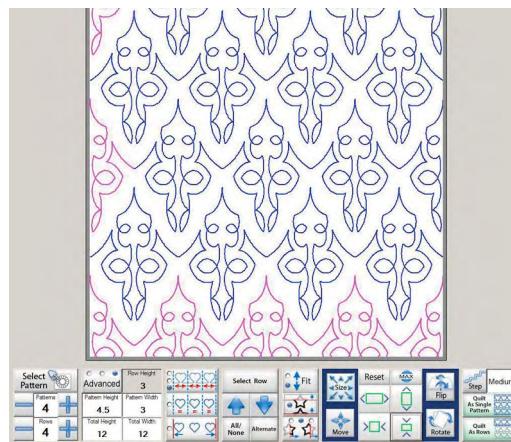
• What is my budget?

If you send your quilt to a professional quilter, it will cost you in dollars and cents. If you're quilting the project yourself, it will require your time. Despite our best intentions, sometimes the quilting decision boils down to what is affordable from both a financial and time commitment standpoint. That doesn't mean you have to settle for overall quilting as your only alternative. You may be able to have the best of both worlds by creatively combining custom and overall designs on your quilt.

Once you have answered the questions above and decided HOW to quilt your project, now you just need to DO it! If you truly can't make up your mind, pretend that you can only bring five quilts along when you go to "quilter's heaven." Would this quilt be in your suitcase at the pearly gates? If so, custom quilting is the ticket. If it didn't make the top five, it doesn't mean you should automatically settle for overall quilting, but it does give you a chance to decide whether your time (or money) is better spent on quilting this particular project or making your next quilt. Just don't let indecision about how to quilt the top hold you back any longer. Remember those words, "Done is good!"



When a longarm quilter follows a pantograph pattern to stitch an overall design, she must calculate the spacing between each row of the design, as well as how much of the design should "spill off" the sides of the quilt. Longarm machines can use a computer to determine all this with just a few mouse clicks, and can easily "wrap" a design from the left side of the quilt to the right side and stagger the rows.



With a few more mouse clicks, the design can be stretched and moved until you're pleased with the overall effect.



Once the setup is complete, you can start the quilting machine, step back, and let it do the work for you.



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